

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

SAFETY, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

**SUBJECT: SWINE FLU UPDATE**

**DATE: 17 NOVEMBER 2009**

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**1 PURPOSE AND DECISION REQUIRED**

- 1.1 This report updates the Committee on TfL's planning, preparations and activities following the outbreak of 'swine flu'. The Committee is asked to note the report.

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The United Kingdom, in line with many other countries, had been preparing for pandemic flu for some years and principal amongst its preparations was the purchase of sufficient anti viral drugs to treat 50 per cent of the population and the planning and preparation of the NHS to be able to respond. Similarly, many other organisations had put plans in place to respond to a pandemic, both in terms of business continuity and provision of necessary care and support to staff.
- 2.2 In April 2009, there was an outbreak of flu in Mexico due to a new A(H1N1) flu virus which was associated with swine flu. On 11 June 2009, following the judgement that there was sustained community transmission in a number of countries, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the flu outbreak to be a pandemic.
- 2.3 Other than in its very initial phases, the outbreak has only resulted in mild illness in most of those contracting it and the fatality rate has been low.
- 2.4 A TfL-wide outline plan for responding to a flu pandemic was in place prior to the outbreak of swine flu, and HR related aspects of pandemic flu were addressed in an HR Safety and Wellbeing Policy. This TfL planning was tested in a three week pan-TfL exercise in February 2009 and a report on the exercise was issued in March. The plan worked effectively and no major changes to the plan were proposed as a result of the exercise. The recommendations for improvements that came out of the exercise were actioned prior to the declaration of the pandemic.

**3 TfL's RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC**

- 3.1 A pan-TfL Flu Gold group was established on the 28 April and this has continued to meet. The three operational modes, Corporate Directorates, Group Facilities, HR, Occupational Health, Internal and External Communications and Crossrail are represented. Department for Transport staff also attend the meetings.

- 3.2 TfL's objectives during the outbreak have been to maintain effective service delivery whilst safeguarding the safety, health and wellbeing of staff, contractors and customers by:
- (a) Ensuring necessary alignment and coordination across TfL on policy matters related to flu, including staff safety and wellbeing;
  - (b) Ensuring operational plans and agreed actions are coordinated;
  - (c) Supporting external and internal communications message development; and
  - (d) Monitoring and sharing information on flu matters across TfL and with external agencies.
- 3.3 The three operational modes and Corporate Directorates have each established 'business level' flu teams that have met on an as needed basis. HR has also established a pan-TfL team to ensure necessary alignment on flu related HR matters.
- 3.4 Following the declaration of the pandemic and in line with plans based on risk assessments and recognising the importance of hand hygiene, supplies of sanitising hand gel were procured for distribution to staff for use when they do not have good access to hand washing facilities.
- 3.5 In the first week of July 2009, the first cases of swine flu were diagnosed in TfL staff and contractors. The number of cases of flu in TfL is being monitored weekly and this showed increasing numbers throughout July, with the rate of increase broadly in line with the rate of increase being reported for London as a whole. Absence peaked in late July/early August with some 250 - 300 staff absent with flu at the peak.
- 3.6 There has been no disruption to service provision in any of the modes as a result of the outbreak.
- 3.7 In response to the increasing numbers of staff falling ill with flu, the decision was made in the third week of July to initiate the distribution of hand gel to staff. The first delivery to all staff was completed in the following week.
- 3.8 As the number of cases of flu had fallen significantly by the end of August, deliveries of hand gel to staff were put on hold, but where staff are reasonably requesting continued supply the request is being met. The number of requests has been very low.
- 3.9 The Government is advising that a 'second wave' of swine flu is now taking place though the case rate is not increasing as rapidly as in the first wave. There has been no sign of an increase of flu cases in TfL, though the incidence is currently still some 50 per cent above last year's rate at this time with approximately 175 cases in the last week of October compared with some 120 cases at the same time last year.
- 3.10 The Government recently revised its planning assumptions for business for the period through to mid May 2010, the end of the 'winter flu season'. They are now predicting lower attack rates than previously and lower fatality rates.

- 3.11 Children under 16 are identified as being significantly more susceptible to the virus and up to 30 per cent may fall ill in this second wave. However, the worst case clinical attack rate across the population as a whole has been reduced from 30 per cent to 12 per cent between now and the end of the normal flu season. Up to a 1,000 further deaths are now considered to be possible over the same time period, compared with 19,000 in the previous reasonable worst case scenario.
- 3.12 On the basis of the above scenarios, Government is now indicating that at peak absence, five per cent of workers could be absent, compared to 12 per cent previously.
- 3.13 The TfL Gold Group continues to monitor developments inside and outside TfL and to liaise with the GLA Functional Bodies, London Resilience and its partner organisations and to seek information and advice from Government departments, including the NHS and the Health Protection Agency when necessary.

## **4 VACCINATION**

- 4.1 The UK Government now has stocks of swine flu vaccine and its programme of vaccination has commenced with the vaccination of vulnerable groups and front line health and social service staff. The vaccination programme is then planned to be rolled out to the wider population.
- 4.2 TfL's Occupational Health Team has initiated its planned winter flu vaccination programme; this vaccine will not give protection against swine flu.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 Based on current Government expectations and advice, it is currently reasonable to believe that the impacts of the outbreak on TfL and its staff are manageable through the plans in place but developments will continue to be carefully monitored.

## **6 RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 The Committee is asked to NOTE the report.

## **7 CONTACT**

- 7.1 Name: Richard Stephenson, Director Group HSE  
Email: [richardstephenson@tfl.gov.uk](mailto:richardstephenson@tfl.gov.uk)  
Phone: 020 7126 4905